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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SINGAPORE 000703

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MTS - M. COPPOLA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SN](#) [CM](#)

SUBJECT: TEETER TOTTER BALANCING ACT FOR FALUN GONG IN
SINGAPORE

REF: SINGAPORE 129

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Daniel Shields for reasons 1.4(d)

¶1. (C) Summary: While Falun Gong (FLG) practitioners in Singapore enjoy a certain degree of freedom, problems still persist. Over the past decade, the organization has seen its membership drop by more than half. Although FLG has received little media coverage in recent years, this does not necessarily imply an easing of tensions between FLG and the GOS. Rather, the organization and its practitioners have matured and learned how to tiptoe around authorities to avoid conflict. Nevertheless, Embassy contacts report that practitioners and their relatives sometimes face obstacles in obtaining or renewing work permits, visas, or permanent residency (PR) status. A negative view of the organization from the general public makes it hard for FLG to expand its membership in Singapore. Contacts cited close ties between China and Singapore as a cause of the obstacles practitioners face, noting that both governments may have infiltrated the organization. Consequently, FLG in Singapore faces a tough balancing act between retaining its somewhat limited ability to practice and proselytize, and pushing for greater freedom for its organization and members. End Summary.

Falun Gong Numbers Drop by More Than Half Since 1999

¶2. (C) The Falun Buddha Society (FBS), the officially registered name for Falun Gong in Singapore, has approximately 300-400 followers, according to FBS president William Ng (strictly protect). Ng noted that membership in Singapore numbered well over a thousand prior to the Chinese government's 1999 crackdown on FLG, but believes that pressure on the GOS from China created the negative attitude towards FLG that still prevails today amongst Singaporean authorities and society. This attitude stems from a number of sources, including newspaper coverage of the arrests of practitioners as well as overseas Chinese propaganda denouncing FLG as an evil cult, Ng said.

¶3. (C) FLG has received little coverage in Singapore's mainstream media in recent years, but this may be a result of self-censorship by FLG rather than a product of decreased tensions between FLG and the GOS. FBS vice-chairman G.K. Lim (strictly protect) suggested to PolOff that over the years, FLG in Singapore has matured as an organization. Practitioners now know what actions and behavior are not tolerated by the GOS and know to operate within the parameters of the law to avoid the media's limelight. The society organizes morning and afternoon meditation sessions at over thirty practice sites across Singapore. Additionally, FBS manages local outlets of The Epoch Times newspaper and Sound of Hope radio station, both FLG-associated media organizations.

14. (C) Close Sino-Singaporean relations explain the heightened obstacles FLG practitioners face in Singapore, according to Lim. FLG practitioners often have difficulty in renewing or obtaining work permits and PR status, particularly before visits of high-ranking Chinese officials, Lim said. She also noted that because of the mainstream media's negative portrayal of FLG, Singaporeans are generally wary of the group, making it difficult to expand membership. Lim attributed these attitudes to the GOS's desire for greater support from China on trade and economic issues.

15. (C) Ng and Lim told PolOff they suspect GOS and Chinese spies have infiltrated the FLG membership in Singapore. In 2007, practitioners reported seeing a man making phone calls near the practice site at Esplanade Park on a weekly basis. Each time practitioners spotted the man, Singaporean police would arrive and disperse the practices or confiscate the informational brochures being handed out. The practitioners who raised this case switched practice locations to avoid trouble from the police.

One Member's Kafkaesque Experiences: The Case of Ma Xiao

16. (C) The case of Ma Xiao (strictly protect), who met with PolOff accompanied by Lim, illustrates some of the difficulties FLG practitioners may face in Singapore if they attract the authorities' attention. A citizen of China, Ma

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moved to Singapore in 1999 on a social visit pass (the equivalent of a tourist visa). She later married a Singaporean and claimed she had difficulties in obtaining PR status due to her activity with Falun Gong. Arrested and fined for participating in an unlawful FLG public assembly in 2000, she nevertheless received permission to remain on condition of good behavior. Ma applied for Singapore permanent residency eleven times, and each time immigration authorities rejected her application without explanation. Ma noted that other Chinese citizens of her socio-economic background usually do not have difficulty renewing or obtaining PR status from the GOS. Her efforts to renew her Chinese passport have also been unsuccessful since July 2008.

The Chinese embassy in Singapore informed her that her case was undergoing investigation, and her passport could not be renewed pending the outcome. Finally, the validity periods for Ma's Singapore visit pass began to shrink, and in June 2009 immigration authorities extended her pass for only two weeks, to expire July 10. Lim was unwilling to tell PolOff whether Ma ultimately had to depart Singapore after July 10, citing "safety concerns."

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